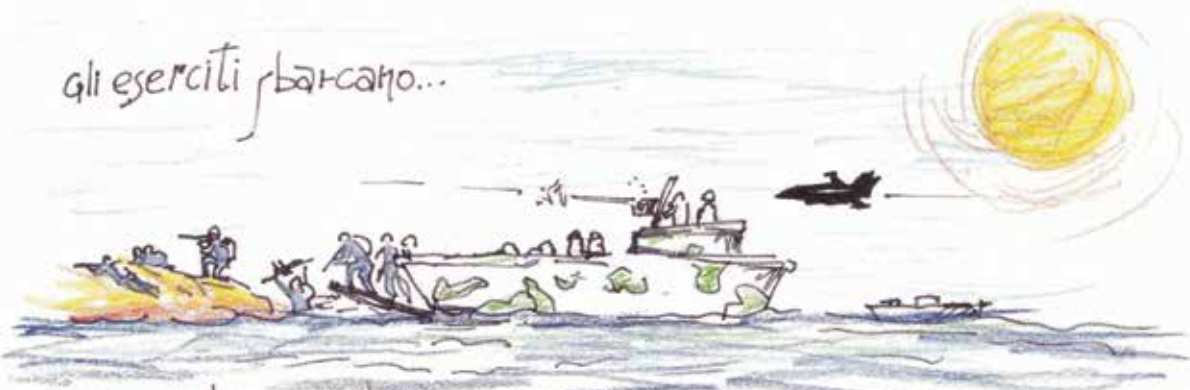


gli eserciti sbarcano...



i migranti approdano.



## 'Safe corridors'

In this special edition of *World Church News*, we want to thank you for your spontaneous and generous giving to support refugees entering Europe this autumn. You will see how your money is benefitting refugees across Europe, and the situation for refugees in the UK today. We also encourage you to reflect on refugees in other parts of the world.

The largest movement of people in Europe since the Second World War has provoked fear, generosity, hostility – and welcome. The movement will not lessen soon. People are fleeing hideous war zones, repressive governments and failing economies. The movement of people from failed agriculture and drought through global warming has hardly begun.

Europe's political system is struggling to make a rational response, but its people respond with enormous generosity as well as anxiety.

### What are Methodist churches and our partners in Europe doing?

They have a long history of hospitality. United Methodist Church (UMC) Germany welcomed people after the Second World War; they received others when the Berlin Wall came down. Many congregations now support asylum seekers. Congregation members befriend, teach the language and help deal with authorities. Some members receive a new view of Scripture, discerning how many stories of faith hinge on migration and hospitality to strangers.

Churches of Central Southern Europe UMC are straddling the routes through the Balkans.

The UMC Miss Stone Centre in Macedonia has ferried food and water, blankets and toiletries to the Greek border. In late September they reported 5,000 people passing through daily. Needs change rapidly, so there is constant planning for the next step. UMC Austria is planning help for long-term housing as well as for integration needs such as language. UMC Hungary members helped at Budapest's Keleti Rail Station in early September when we saw so many distressing TV pictures. UMC Serbia assists the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO) to improve camp conditions at the Serbian/Croatian border.

In Italy the Methodist Waldensian Union is at the forefront of the Protestant Federation's Mediterranean Hope programme offering welcome to boat passengers in Lampedusa as well as post-trauma and integration support in the House of Culture. They monitor and publicise the situation and promote policies to ensure 'safe corridors' for vulnerable people from North Africa.

The **Methodist Church**  
World Mission Fund

Refugee Update  
DECEMBER 2015

# Challenges and opportunities

By the Revd Frank Aichele, General Secretary for World Mission, Evangelical Methodist Church, Germany

Nearly 800,000 refugees have come to Germany this year, many from war-torn countries such as Syria and Iraq. Logistically, this is a big challenge for all.

Many Methodist congregations have taken that challenge to support the refugees placed in their neighbourhoods. Some invite them to their Sunday services. Others have organised language classes or provided activities for the younger refugees. We, as the United Methodist Church (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche, or EmK for short) in Germany,

have set up a fund to help these congregations with their work. So far we have been able to give money to churches to transform unused parts of a building into a refugee flat, to employ people part-time to coordinate the support for refugees and to buy items necessary for this vital work. We are thankful that the Methodist Church in Britain has supported us with a financial contribution to this fund.

These challenges have now also proven to be an opportunity for many churches. Here we can show God's love in action to those around us. We

have seen positive transformations; small, elderly congregations have opened themselves and find a new focus for their work, bigger congregations are starting new services in different languages. Many refugees are coming and showing an interest in Christianity. Already, several people have been baptised and joined the EmK. This will revitalise our work and ways of being Church in many ways. It will remain a challenge for our congregations, but we already see God's blessing in it.

## A mother's view

By Christine Elliott

What must it feel like to embark on a journey, not knowing if you will reach the destination you hope for? I'm still not sure how I would feel, but I do know that if I were living in a situation where I faced probable death, I would go. Somewhere, somehow – and now!

I recently visited the town of Idomeni on the northern border of Greece with the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, and Beirut in Lebanon. At the border crossing I met several young men. They were all hopeful, longing for a better life. One in which they could study, or work and be useful in society. Their families had given them money to go in the hope that they would make it. One young man was so upbeat about having got that far without mishap, and having recently seen TV broadcasts of football fans waving posters saying "Refugees welcome", he was confident he would find a better life than the one from which he was fleeing: the one where he was almost certain to get caught up in fighting a war he didn't want and in which he could so



easily die. And if I were his mother, I would be saying "GO!"

This movement of refugees and migrants will almost certainly have some repercussions that we cannot fully appreciate. But blindness to the ghastly reality of war and its fallout on humanity must be faced head-on with compassion and wisdom.

I believe we need to face this generational challenge with confidence that we can bring about change. We need not fear that we will be overrun by 'them' or fear that our Christian values will be undermined by another set of values. If we are confident in our faith and that the gospel we proclaim

is so that we ALL might have life in all its abundance, then we can be part of the solution.

Find ways of giving time to those who do arrive in our communities but be realistic. Don't offer to do too much that you run out of steam and then want to give up. Half an hour or so a week is enough time to do some conversational English or take someone shopping. Ask them to share a meal with you. Share recipes. Talk. Be friendly.

There was a saying among Christians in China at the time of the Cultural Revolution: "Remember, your face may be the only Bible anyone may read."

## Mediterranean Hope

Lampedusa. This idyllic Italian island, once only known as a tourist hotspot, is now better known as the primary destination not for tourists but for refugees trying to enter Europe.

In October 2013, over 360 refugees drowned off the coast of Lampedusa after their boat capsized. The local people have been welcoming refugees to the island for years and were quick to help those emerging from the sea, chilled by far more than the waters they struggled against.

In 2014, the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy launched the Mediterranean Hope project, which has since taken on three main tasks:

- The observatory on the island publishes regular reports on various social media, and more recently has challenged the militarisation of the welcoming process.
- The House of Cultures in the town of Scicli, is a welcome and accommodation centre, which can accommodate up to 40 people.
- The resettlement desk helps refugees enter Italy or other European countries, and aims to establish 'humanitarian corridors' of safe passage for refugees.



The pictures in this update are all the work of Francesco Piobbichi, an artist and resident of Lampedusa. Like most of Lampedusa's other residents, Francesco refuses to take pictures of arriving refugees. Instead, he paints the scenes unfolding on the island – giving a voice (and, indeed, hope) to those arriving on Mediterranean shores in search of refuge.

## Refugees in Asia and the Pacific

By Steve Pearce

There are many refugees in different parts of Asia and the Pacific who seldom feature in our news media. The impact of climate change may well create 250 million refugees worldwide by 2050 in places such as the Pacific islands and Bangladesh.

In areas of the Pacific, sea level is rising by 1.2cm a year – four times faster than the global average. For some of the coral-based islands only two or three metres above sea level, this has already resulted in relocation (our mission partner Julia Edwards has reported on some of these; her newsletters are available online at [www.methodist.org.uk/juliaedwards](http://www.methodist.org.uk/juliaedwards)).

Last year the Kiribati government bought 20 sq km of land on the Fiji island of Vanua Levu, in case people needed to move. Dozens of villages in Fiji itself will soon be moved; 2,000 people from the Carteret atoll of Papua New Guinea will soon relocate to mainland Bougainville, a three-hour boat trip away, because of salt intrusion and tidal damage. Also last year, engineers from Australia and Britain helped plan the relocation of Taro, a town in the Solomon Islands. The move will mark the first time a regional capital in the Pacific has been displaced for environmental reasons.

Conflict and poverty continue to force relocation in many hotspots

too. In Southeast Asia, millions risk hazardous journeys in order to provide for their families. We have worked with our Partner Churches in Malaysia and Myanmar to provide ministry to those who have reached Malaysia from Myanmar and are vulnerable. We have similarly worked with partners in Pakistan to support those forced to leave.

All this movement of peoples has given human traffickers opportunities to make their unsavoury profits. And so we work across South Asia to raise awareness of this, and to help people move safely if they have to.





## A refugee speaks

**Aweis Ahmed is a refugee from Somalia, now living in Italy. He spoke to Marta Bernardini, a co-worker with the Mediterranean Hope project.**

**T**o those who ask, “Would it not have been better to remain at home rather than die in the sea?” I answer: We are neither stupid nor backward. We are in despair and are being pursued. To remain would mean certain death, to go means a probable death. Which would you choose? Or better put, which would you choose for your children?

To those who ask, “What do you hope to find in Europe? If there is not even work for us here, how can there be work for others?” I answer: We seek security, a future. We hope to survive. It is not our fault that we came into the world at the ‘wrong’ place. And it is not your own doing which meant you were born in the ‘right’ part of the world.

My father-in-law fled with me. Before you get to the sea, there is the desert. It kills as many as the sea. But these bodies do not evoke any emotions as no one sees them on their screens. There are no journalists there, continually asking how many women and children have died, and how many of the women were pregnant. For here in the West it seems as though the gravity does not reach out; it needs more emotion. My father-in-law died in the desert. From hunger. After no one had given us anything to eat for 24 days. At home is a wife, who will not believe the tragedy and who waits for a call, which I know she will never have. At home are the leftovers of a dream; a plan, a life. A ticket for two from the touts was too expensive; they didn’t have the money. If he had stayed behind, they would both have been killed. His last present to his wife was life. As he fled, her life no longer had a value, so she was left alone.

To those who ask, “How can we prevent more deaths in the Mediterranean?” I reply: Come and see how we live, where we live, look at our schools, read our newspapers, walk along our streets, listen to our politicians. Before you enact the umpteenth law, the umpteenth order, the umpteenth special measures, get to know us. Find the answers in the places from which we are fleeing and not in the places we wish to get to.

Change the perspective, put our shoes on and try to live, as we live. You will understand that the criminals who put us in their ‘bathtubs’, the desert, the sea, the hate and the indifference, which many of us expect, are not the worst things that can happen.

# Together we can make a difference

From the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)

The last few months have seen the largest movement of people since the Second World War. This is not a sudden phenomenon, but one that has been growing in intensity over the last decade. Nor is it a UK problem; rather it is a global crisis that is now touching the shores of the UK. And it is not a crisis that will be over by Christmas; war, poverty and instability mean that mass migration will be a feature of this century.

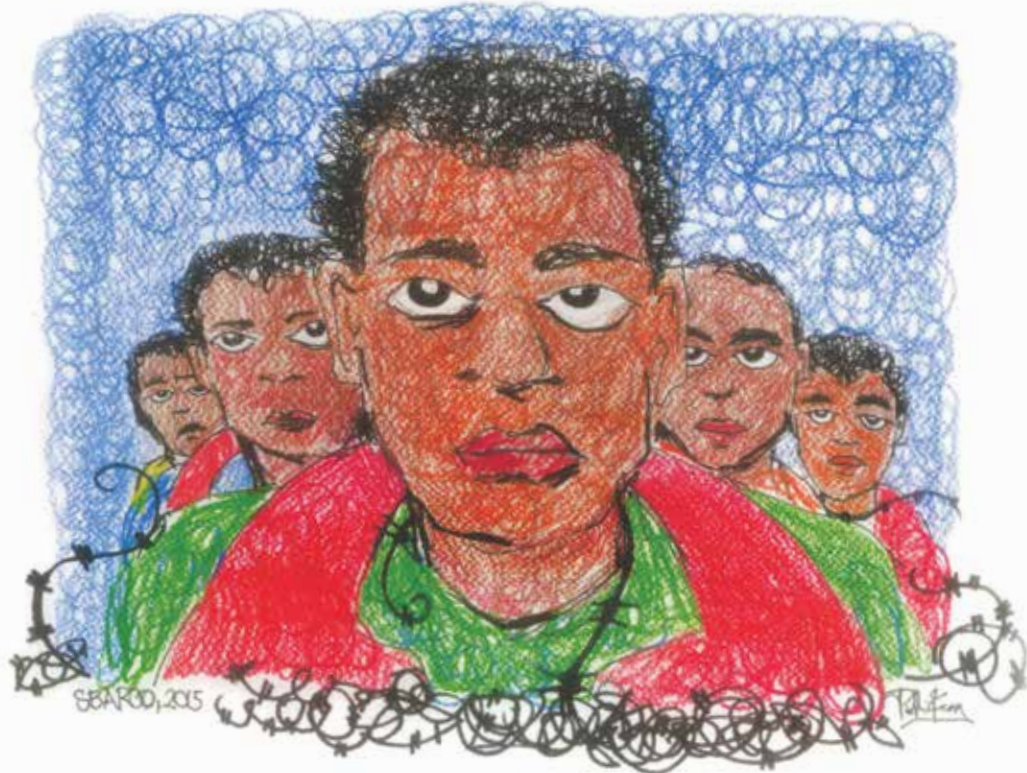
Many people have been moved to want to help those affected by the crisis. But what action can we take to help?

Some people have organised practical donations of goods for those living at the 'jungle' camp in Calais. This needs to be done in an efficient way which recognises what is needed by those living there and the constraints on storage. Calais has asked, for example, that people do not deliver goods directly to Calais. Co-ordination with a grassroots organisation in Calais will mean the right things are being collected and the most helpful offers identified.

Baptist minister Juliet Kilpin has written a guest blog on JPIT's website<sup>1</sup>. This offers seven practical suggestions of help.

The Government has agreed to take in 20,000 refugees over five years from those living in camps bordering Syria. Local authorities are now deciding how many families they will take in. How has your local authority responded? Pressure from local church groups has led to Birmingham City Council accepting 50 refugee families. What impact can you have?

Discover how your local authority is planning to resettle the refugees and



support them, and how you and your church can help.

If you think more can and should be being done on a national scale then write to your MP (see [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)). Make it clear what you think should be done in response to the crisis. (You could also welcome the fact that the UK is a leading international humanitarian donor). It is always more effective to write a letter to an MP in your own words than to sign a petition. But if in doubt, do both!

Many people have expressed an interest in offering their houses to refugees including those already here. Housing Justice has written a guide offering models for accommodation and support<sup>2</sup>.

The system for those seeking asylum in this country is becoming harsher, with support being cut for asylum seekers with children for example. Refugee Action's [Bring Back Dignity](#) campaign is asking for fair asylum support for all<sup>3</sup>.

While the focus is on refugees, we must not forget other issues of poverty and injustice facing our country. The Welfare Reform and Work Bill currently in parliament will make poor people poorer. Our [#enough](#) report and campaign<sup>4</sup> will give you all the information and invite you to act.

People are suffering – both abroad and in this country. We are called to do what we can to help and to tackle injustice. Together we can make a difference.

## Links:

1. Juliet Kilpin's guest blog for JPIT: [bit.ly/jpitJKilpin](http://bit.ly/jpitJKilpin)
2. The Housing Justice guide: [bit.ly/HJrefugeeguide](http://bit.ly/HJrefugeeguide)
3. Bring Back Dignity: [bit.ly/bringbackdignity](http://bit.ly/bringbackdignity)
4. JPIT's #enough campaign: [bit.ly/Enoughcampaign](http://bit.ly/Enoughcampaign)



**T**hank you for giving so much. Just three and a half weeks after deciding to direct financial support via our World Mission Fund, donations had reached a remarkable £28,277.56 (including Gift Aid)! Contributions, prayers and heart-felt wishes came from Methodists all over Britain – including individuals, households and churches. **At the time of writing, the total income received stands at £52,008.58.** Methodists and non-Methodists alike have offered their homes and English lessons to asylum seekers in the UK. We are overwhelmed by your generosity. Thank you and please continue to pray as this situation changes.

## ACT NOW

**We are actively continuing our work to alleviate the plight of refugees in Europe. Your ongoing support is vital to ensure our partners can expand their life-giving work.**

GIVE what you can. Please make cheques payable to “The Methodist Church World

Mission Fund” and include a covering letter stating that your donation is for “Methodist refugee support”.

### Send your cheque to:

Mission and Advocacy  
Methodist Church House  
25 Marylebone Road  
London NW1 5JR

## Prayer points

- Pray for the thousands of people around the world who journey in search of peace and a place of sanctuary.
- Pray for those seeking refuge on European shores, especially during the winter season.
- Thank God for all those doing what they can to demonstrate the love of God to those in need: for the UMC’s work in Macedonia, the work of the UMC Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche in Germany, and of Mediterranean Hope in Italy.
- Thank God for those in the UK who have donated money to this cause. Pray that the Lord may give us a true heart for social justice, to act on behalf of those who are vulnerable.

